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SUBJECT: SPAIN: DEFENSE POLDIR ON AFGHANISTAN, MANAS,
LEBANON, NATO MINISTERIAL

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[1](#)B. IIR 6 889 0205 07

Classified By: Charge Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 b & d.

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: MOD Secretary General for Defense Policy Luis Cuesta told Charge on June 18 that last week's NATO Defense Ministerial was "lively" and brought progress on the NATO Response Force (NRF), missile defense, and Afghanistan. Cuesta said that Spanish military training teams (OMLTs) should be in Afghanistan in July, assuming Parliamentary approval on June 26, where they will train two battalions of Afghan National Army troops, plus a new company in Badghis province. Cuesta emphasized the need for close coordination between NATO's ISAF mission and the OEF Coalition, and judged that the Taliban is significantly weaker than it was a year ago. Charge raised the need to work with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members to keep them supportive of NATO's efforts in Afghanistan and to ensure continued use of Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan (ref A). Cuesta said that Spain relies on the base, noting good cooperation between the US and Spanish troops there, and said that he would talk with MFA about how Spain could work with SCO members on the issue. Cuesta said that he had talked with his Israeli counterpart several times on June 17, always urging Israel restraint in the face of the recent rocket attack fired from Lebanon. Cuesta said that the rockets were likely fired by al-Queda-associated Palestinians in hopes of provoking a strong reaction from Israel. END SUMMARY.

-- NATO DEFENSE MINISTERIAL --

[1](#)2. (C) In response to Charge's request for a readout of the recent NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels, Cuesta said that the meetings were lively and that Spain was satisfied with the Ministerial's results. He said that everyone noticed the difference between the Russians' calm comments on missile defense behind closed doors - where the Russians acknowledged that Iran is a threat and talked about cooperating with the US - and its shrill public pronouncements. Cuesta said that Spain appreciated Secretary Gates' proposal to focus on reducing the number of troops assigned to NATO commands from 13,000 to 11,500 rather than making changes to the structure of the commands. (COMMENT: This means that Spain doesn't have to worry, for the moment, about losing the NATO Land Component Command base outside of Madrid. END COMMENT.) He said that discussions on the NRF were difficult, but that the Ministers had found a way forward on common funding for short-notice NRF missions and the ability to deploy NRF troops as an operational reserve in extremis, with national

approval. Cuesta said that Spain continues to be concerned about the legal foundation of the C-17 consortium and is waiting to see the NATO SYG's proposal that is intended to ensure that allies outside the consortium could bear no financial or legal responsibility.

-- AFGHANISTAN --

¶3. (C) Spain circulated during the NATO Ministerial a draft "success strategy" for the NATO-ISAF mission, as Cuesta and DASD Fata discussed in May. Cuesta said that the strategy non-paper includes the following elements:

- (1) increasing Afghan ownership for all aspects of the mission,
- (2) better coordination between security and reconstruction/development efforts,
- (3) synergy of international organizations including the naming of a UN Special Envoy,
- (4) increased attention to regional relations,
- (5) increased provincial outreach, and
- (6) better political control over the ISAF mission by the NAC.

Cuesta expressed the view that Spain's paper was well received and even mentioned positively by Secretary Gates and defense ministers from several other key countries.

¶4. (C) Charge noted that he had spoken at a conference on Afghanistan last week and said that the US is cautiously optimistic about the situation there. He said that Afghanistan has taken a huge step forward and that the challenge for NATO and its partners is to sustain and increase its effort. Charge acknowledged Spain's success at integrating its political, development, and military efforts,

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and said that the US has noted the close coordination between Cuesta and MFA political director Rafael Dezcallar, including their trip together to Kabul and Herat. Cuesta said that the GOS is committed for the long-term in Afghanistan. He said that the Taliban is appreciably weaker this year, unable to attack head-on or maintain its advances as it did last summer. Cuesta emphasized the need to closely coordinate political with military efforts and ISAF with OEF efforts, saying that it is important not to make tactical gains at the price of political progress.

¶5. (C) When SACEUR visited Madrid last week, he seemed keen for the Embassy to clarify Spain's plans for providing military training in Afghanistan. Cuesta told Charge that Spain would send two OMLTs (about 50 military personnel) to work with about 1200 Afghan National Army (ANA) troops (two battalions) beginning in July. A few Spanish troops are already in the field, preparing for the task. As previously reported (ref B), the ANA battalions - one logistical support battalion and one base services battalion - are in Regional Command-West. Cuesta said that the training would last about 18 months or until the ANA battalions were certified, and that Spain was willing to consider providing training in the future, if necessary. He said that Defense Minister Alonso would seek Parliamentary approval on June 26 to raise Spain's 690-person limit on troops in Afghanistan in order to accommodate these additional 50 troops. If Parliament approves, as expected, the Spanish OMLTs would deploy in July.

¶6. (C) In addition to the two OMLTs, Spain is also working with Afghanistan's Defense Ministry to set up an ANA company in Badghis province. Cuesta said that while the province really needs at least two battalions, a company would be a good start in an area where there is not a national security presence. He said that Spain would use the ANA's standard training program for this company, would build a base for the ANA troops, and would provide all needed equipment. He emphasized, however, that Afghan MOD would recruit and pay the troops, thus ensuring that the Badghis company would not be orphaned when Spain is no longer around to support it.

-- SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION / MANAS AIR BASE --

¶17. (S) Charge explained US concerns about the upcoming SCO summit and asked that Spain approach SCO members to lobby for a positive summit outcome that would support NATO-ISAF efforts in Afghanistan. Cuesta said that Spain's air transportation unit in Manas receives excellent support from the US troops. He said that Spain values the base, and promised to talk with his counterpart at the Foreign Ministry about how Spain could effectively approach SCO countries.

-- LEBANON --

¶18. (C) Cuesta said that on June 17 he had spoken with his Israeli counterpart several times after three Katyusha rockets were launched from Lebanon into Israel. He said that Lebanese and Spanish troops had investigated the attack and assessed that Palestinians, probably linked to Al Queda rather than Hizballah, had launched the rockets in an effort to destabilize the situation. Cuesta said that while Israel's right of self-defense is undeniable, he had asked Israel not to act in a way that could endanger UNIFIL's troops or mission. He worried that while Israel had shown restraint so far, it would respond aggressively to a similar future attack. Cuesta said that Spain will continue to try to convince Israel to let the Lebanese army and UNIFIL respond to provocations along the border. Charge responded that we would pass his message back to Washington, but noted that the attacks put Israel in a difficult situation in which it has to weigh its interest in not escalating the situation against legitimately defending its territory and citizens.
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